

One Can Keep A Secret (If He Does Not Know It's There)

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One Can Keep A Secret (If He Does Not Know It's There)

by [H_Belle](#)

Summary

At fifteen, during summer camp in Cloud Recesses, Wei Wuxian invents a bunch of talismans when bored or prompted by Nie Husaisang. Thinking it awfully funny, he creates a throwaway account at a professional cultivation research/purchase network and uploads them for sale for a modest fee. Then, he forgets about the whole thing.

Years later, the mysterious Yiling Patriarch is known in all Jianghu as an elusive genius cultivator who revolutionised his field.

Those two statements might or might not be related.

In other words: three different ways in which Wei Wuxian finds out he is filthy rich and academically acclaimed. That's it. That's the story.

Notes

Inspired by [this](#) post and all its reblogs on Tumblr.

Beta by Epistemology ❤️

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

IT COULD HAVE GONE LIKE THIS:

Wei Wuxian could honestly say the last thing he expected at his doorstep on a late Sunday morning was to find himself face to the beard with Lan Qiren.

“...Huh.” Cheerful rebuff died on his tongue because the Lan Grandmaster slash his one-time teacher definitely was not a door-to-door salesman, and neither were the lauded Twin Jades flanking their uncle. The trio cut imposing figures, all broad-shouldered and dressed up to the nines in white and blue hanfu. Here, in Yiling. For no apparent reason, other than abusing the doorbell at Wei Wuxian’s little cottage.

Looking at them, Wei Wuxian was suddenly painfully aware of his worn bathrobe, loosely tied in his haste, and waist-length hair sleep-tousled something fierce. Bunny-shaped slippers on his feet did not make him feel better about himself either.

“Wei Wuxian!” Lan Qiren thundered, his pinched expression like a promise of heavenly retribution.

Automatically, without any input from his brain, Wei Wuxian slammed the door in his face.

Big mistake.

“Wei Wuxian, open the door this instant!” A muffled yell came from the other side, punctuated by the insistent doorbell.

He knew he shouldn’t. He promised he really knew better. It was just that when it came to the Lans, Wei Wuxian could never quite help himself. “Make me.”

An honest-to-heaven roar of rage shook the windows. The doorknob was rattling now to accompany the doorbell. Enraptured, Wei Wuxian watched it go up and down, with a sinking feeling kissing goodbye to the naive hope that this was but a vivid dream, brought about by the fumes of vinegar, because actually, he was still asleep, slumped over the kitchen table amid pickling radishes. Not facing a home invasion from the most judgemental cultivators since a Daoist first cultivated golden core.

Why were they here?

Weren’t they through, Wei Wuxian and the oh-so-righteous clans? By the insistence of the latter, nonetheless?

“Uncle, please step aside.”

Oh boy. That smooth baritone, carefully enunciating each word, never saying more than absolutely needed – it was Lan Wangji speaking. The good old fuddy-duddy, teacher’s pet extraordinaire monitoring halls for fun, relentless in pursuit of Wei Wuxian’s contraband booze, unyielding to Wei Wuxian’s pouting and whining, with long, elegant fingers that closed like a shackle around Wei Wuxian’s wrist when dragging him to punishment, because harmless flirting between guest disciples was apparently forbidden. All grown up now and so

handsome, so steadfast and determined, and sorely lacking fucks to give about breaking down Wei Wuxian's door.

"Gee, okay!" He called, frantically wrestling with the lock. "Calm down! No need to inflict property damage!" There really wasn't. Wei Wuxian had been making ends meet by the skin of his teeth. Unplanned repairs could destroy his budget for months.

He opened the door just a smidge.

"Is this a social call, or – ?"

Lan Qiren rudely pushed his way inside.

"Make yourself at home, why don't you," Wei Wuxian pouted, watching helplessly as the Twin Jades took a page of their uncle's book, storming inside in a flurry of long sleeves, forehead ribbons flying dramatically behind.

What happened to the gentlemanly conduct, Wei Wuxian would have liked to know. He felt like filing some sort of formal complaint; both the grandmaster and his nephews failed to display any of the famous Lan manners, not to mention common decency, yet it was him stuck with a tarnished reputation and labelled as shameless.

He closed the door with a sigh.

Turning around, he found Lan Qiren in the kitchen area, glaring at the makeshift rack with drying persimmons as if it had personally offended him. He then turned said glare onto Wei Wuxian and oh, the judgement was there, alright, so thick it almost liquified in the air.

To top it off, the bare skin of Wei Wuxian's collarbones was prickling under the full force of Lan Wangji's disdain.

"I'm just gonna..." Wei Wuxian trailed off, waving in the vague direction of the bedroom. Whatever this was about, he would rather deal with the Lan woes while having some more layers on.

"By all means," Lan Xichen generously allowed, taking in the humble surroundings, careful to maintain his benign smile. "We can wait until you are decent."

Wei Wuxian fled.

He was back five minutes later, though, semi-presentable in a faded t-shirt and pouring tea into a mismatched set of cups. The Lans were watching all his movements like three, overgrown hawks from the other side of the table, which could easily send those faint of a heart to an early grave.

Luckily, Wei Wuxian fancied himself made of sterner stuff.

He perfunctorily swept crumbs off the table, before flopping back in his chair to fix his guests with an expectant look.

“You’ve been, ah...” Lan Xichen cast around for something to say in a valiant attempt at small talk, “baking, Master Wei?” He delicately picked a piece of the leftover sweet rice cake Wei Wuxian had planned to have with his coffee later.

“Have you been well?” Lan Wangji shot off, as though his brother hadn't said a thing.

And that, apparently, was it for Lan Qiren.

“Baking cakes, WHO CARES! Wei Wuxian, how dare you!”

Wei Wuxian calmly took a sip of his tea, chirped porcelain clinking. It has been a while since he had an authority figure hollering that very question, hasn't it? He could get nostalgic if he weren't careful.

As expected, his outward nonchalance incensed the old man even further.

“Wasting everyone’s time when it’s a time like this, and you are just...” Furious eyes fell on the jars neatly lined on the kitchen counter, “in Yiling, pickling radishes!”

“Hey!” Wei Wuxian protested.

Sure, from the Lans’ old money perspective his little cottage with second-hand furniture was probably equivalent to a hovel but had made a good life for himself here, free of debts, contempt, the list could go on. The important thing was that he dusted himself off, having crawled from the ditch people like Lan Qiren expected him to perish in, and still managed to make something of himself.

Also, he felt very protective of his radishes.

Lan Xichen put a placating hand on his uncle’s arm. “Master Wei, don’t you have a phone? Or internet access? Many people have been trying to reach you.”

Wei Wuxian cocked his head, ponytail swishing to the side. “Reach me?” Him? What people? Like, cultivation clans people?

Sounded fake.

“Whatever for?”

For a hot moment, it looked like the sheer outrage robbed Lan Qiren of his words.

“Have you been paying ANY attention to the world outside this backwater?!”

Well.

The short answer would be no.

The long answer would still be a *no* but with a *fuck you* attached that could be extended to a low-key retort.

Why should he bother keeping up with the Jianghu? The Jiangs bled him dry and then discarded him, the clans shunned him for a number of supposed faults, the worst one not being blood-related to anyone perceived *important*, and now that Wei Wuxian has obediently made himself scarce, washing his hands off anything mainstream cultivation, the Lans still had the gall to barge in, eat his rice cake and be offended.

But the years spent in the same compound as Yu Ziyuan taught him there was no use bringing the attention of the angry and entitled to their bullshit.

So instead he said, “I’ll have you know Yiling is a perfectly lovely place.”

“YOU – !”

“Uncle – !”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji chimed in, his voice filled with yearning as though he hadn’t spent his formative years snubbing his once a classmate at any given opportunity. Wei Wuxian wondered what was up with that, especially since it did not escape his attention either, how Lan Wangji seemed unable to tear his eyes away from him. Under different circumstances Wei Wuxian would have been compelled to tease him about it, implying Lan Wangji was *drinking in his features* or something equally embarrassing – for Lan Wangji, that is. Painfully, dreadfully embarrassing for Lan Wangji.

He squirmed in his seat.

“Master Wei,” between his borderline qi-deviating uncle and uncharacteristically soulful brother, Lan Xichen took upon himself the role of the Lan spokesperson.

And thus, he went in for the kill.

“The inventions you’ve been selling online as the Yiling Patriarch revolutionised modern cultivation.”

Wei Wuxian needed a long moment to make sense of what he had just heard.

“What?” He blurted out eventually, looking from one Lan to another.

“These old things?!” He exclaimed, incredulous, once the ridiculous alias stirred the memories from the summer camp in Cloud Recesses, years ago. *Yiling Patriarch* had been the name of a throwaway account on a well-respected research-cum-purchasing network he had created with Nie Huaisang over a stolen sip of Emperor’s Smile to upload some of his doodled talismans and arrays.

For the sole purpose of shits and giggles.

“Nah, Zewu-jun, now you’re pulling my leg!” Wei Wuxian laughed good-naturedly, as thoroughly entertained as he had been back then, at the thought of anyone paying actual human money for a design that made lotus pods glow in the dark. “I made all of them back in

high school!” The lotus pod one might have been even older than that, actually. “And half of them on a dare!”

What could he say, for the fifteen-year-old Wei Wuxian in Cloud Recesses, all it took was Nie Huaisang being like *one jar of Emperor's Smile that you can't come up with a counter to the Hundred Holes Curse before lights out*, and it was on.

The Lans didn't share his merriment.

“If you cannot trust my words alone, maybe you can trust your bank statement.”

As if on cue, Lan Wangji reached into his wide sleeve to hand Wei Wuxian a sealed envelope.

“The most recent one. They have been piling up at your last known place of residence.”

Bemused, Wei Wuxian accepted the envelope. Looking at the address – somewhere in Qinghe countryside – he vaguely recalled Nie Huaisang making him open an online bank account not linked to the Jiangs, graciously suggesting the Nie summerhouse as his fake place of residence. *Just in case someone does pay human money to see lotuses glow*, Nie Huaisang had said, a fluttering fan hiding half of his face.

Wei Wuxian's smile waned.

Feeling like he was a nine-year-old again and about to be chewed out for knocking down a teacup in front of Yu Ziyuan, he tore the envelope open. He spotted his name as he unfolded the statement, papers rustling, and then his eyes fell on the numbers.

“Um...” Wei Wuxian looked up from the many, many zeros and no coma in sight. “There has to be a mistake,” he implored, turning to Lan Qiren.

The Lan Grandmaster's cold stare held no mercy.

Perhaps in lieu of an answer, Lan Wangji silently passed him a paperback edition of *Journal of Contemporary Talismanic and Array Science*. Wei Wuxian listlessly flipped the pages, falling deeper into his shell-shocked state with every reference to Yiling Patriarch he spotted, all dutifully marked with a highlighter.

Footnotes were distressingly yellow with them.

Wei Wuxian gently put the journal down on the table.

“I think I need to lie down.” And scream into his pillow.

“Master Wei,” Lan Xichen rushed to say because dropping this bomb alone wouldn't quite cut it. “We were hoping you would lend us your expertise. Before passing away, Wen Rouhan cast a powerful curse on all cultivation clans, unlike anything we have seen before. If there is anyone who can lift it and...” He thinly swallowed. “Save us all. It is you.”

Wei Wuxian stared at him, not entirely sure he followed anything that was being said anymore.

Lan Qiren cleared his throat. “As for myself, I refuse to let the most brilliant inventor of our time waste his talents, digging dirt in Yiling.”

Oh no, now the Grandmaster Lan was dishing backhanded compliments to boot! The world truly must have been ending, or at least the Jianghu side of it. Unsure what to even address first, he defaulted to the knee-jerk reaction. “I tutor schoolchildren, too.”

“Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji interjected and the air about him, or maybe something in the molten gold of his beautiful eyes, spoke louder than a thousand words that the curses and the whole of Jianghu could burn for all he cared. “Please, come to Gusu with me.”

The plea, so earnest it had Wei Wuxian’s heart aching, cut through the haze in his mind, bringing some much-needed clarity.

Many would argue he was under no obligation to help the clans, with everything that had happened. Some might see in it poetic justice – what goes around comes around, the discarded now discarding. Pettiness was an option that no one could begrudge him.

But.

What would the pettiness accomplish?

Would anyone be better off by it?

Wei Wuxian sighed, defeated. “Let me pack my qiankun pouch.”

*(The Lans did let him pack his qiankun pouch. Wei Wuxian got to work right away and in a couple of hours was ready to storm the ancestral seat of the Wen Clan, black flute oozing resentful energy, and in an act that doubled as dramatic identity reveal, promptly lifted the curse. Once the dust settled, Lan Wangji launched into an aggressive courtship – witnesses said alcohol and live chickens were involved – with the determination of the love-struck who had their wedding figured out on Pinterest since the tender age of sixteen. To Wei Wuxian’s horror, their upcoming nuptials became **the** social event of the season with everyone who was someone at Jianghu desperate for a front-row seat on Yiling Patriarch and Second Young Master Lan performing three bows. Seeing his beloved’s distress, Lan Wangji suggested elopement. They ended up marrying at a small shrine in Yiling, surrounded by the children Wei Wuxian once tutored. Their first dinner as a married couple was pickled radishes.*

The big ceremony at Cloud Recesses still happened, though.)

IT SHOULD HAVE GONE LIKE THIS:

Wei Wuxian had officially been a rogue, homeless cultivator for approximately one hour and twenty-seven minutes when Nie Huaisang kidnapped him off a park bench to a nearby cafe.

“So you finally did it,” Nie Huaisang chose for his opening statement, veiled in the steam rising from their teapot.

Wei Wuxian grimaced. Defecting was an idea he had been toying with for some time now, perhaps to no one's surprise. For the longest time, he had held onto his resolve that he could find a way to be happy, serving at Lotus Pier in any capacity the clan leader would see fit. But things were bad – arguably had been bad for a long time now, even before Jiang Fengmian brought him under his roof as an unknown variable. And these past months only showed him beyond any reasonable doubt there was no way he could stay without hurting the Jiangs – both the clan and the family unit.

Madam...no, Yu Ziyuan absolutely flipping at the news that Wei Wuxian would be graduating high school valedictorian only forced his hand a bit sooner than ideal.

It was fine, though! He got a full STEM scholarship waiting at Gusu Academy and surely, he would find a part-time job around campus. He just needed a minute to figure out what to do with himself in the meanwhile.

He shared something to that effect with Nie Huaisang.

Who seemed to think this was even less of a deal than Wei Wuxian did.

“Why don’t you check into a nice hotel until autumn?” He flippantly suggested, pouring them both a fresh cup of tea. “Or better yet, go sightseeing!” Nie Huaisang cheered, excited at his own idea. “As the head disciple, you never had the time to properly enjoy yourself when away from the Lotus Pier.”

“Um...” Wei Wuxian hesitated. He knew that Nie Huaisang’s airheaded mannerism was a smokescreen and that Nie Huaisang at least suspected that he knew – so the clan’s heir-typical lack of insight into the financial woes of fellow mortals caught him a bit off guard.

Eventually, he went for the *tell me you are broke without telling me you are broke* kind of approach.

“I didn't get the head disciple's payoff.” To scrape the surface of the years’ worth of head disciple’s compensation that mysteriously got lost in the transfer, getting his account halved. If at all. “I could contest the Jiangs before civil authorities, but then Yu Ziyuan would bring out their lawyers and I – ”

“No, don't get me wrong. They ought to pay your due, but it's not like you're broke without it.”

Had it been anyone else saying those words, he would have been tempted to counter with self-deprecating *the state of my wallet begs to differ* or something along those lines. It was Nie Huaisang, though, snapping his fan open to hide his expression, the glint in his eye *knowing* .

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, nothing much,” his friend waved him off in a manner highly implying the opposite to be true. “Just, I was thinking about the summer camp at Cloud Recesses lately. Do you remember it?”

“Vaguely.” Save for Lan Wangji’s unearthly beauty which imprinted itself behind his eyelids, but Nie Huaisang needn’t be made aware of that.

“Does the Yiling Patriarch ring any bell, then?” Above the fluttering fan, his friend’s gaze was oddly intense.

Yiling Patriarch?

Wei Wuxian cocked his head to the side. The name itself did ring a bell but like, a couple of villages over. Definitely nowhere close. The more he turned it over in his mind, however, a half-forgotten memory resurfaced, of himself and his present company giggling over a registration form to the Cultivation Research Independent, a mess of talismans doodled in Wei Wuxian’s hand sprawled all around them, barely visible in the gentle glow of a single lotus pod.

Sensing they were now on the same page, Nie Huaisang snapped his fan shut.

“What if I told you someone did pay human money to see lotuses glow.”

Wei Wuxian slowly blinked, somehow not having seen this coming.

What if, Nie Huaisang asked. Well, he supposed the appropriate response would be to laugh himself silly. Except his friend was sort of, kind of telling him just that, yet here Wei Wuxian was, suddenly very empathetic of a deer caught in the headlights and definitely not laughing.

Nie Huaisang leaned in, all predatorial and gleeful about. He had never resembled his fearsome older brother more than at that very moment. “And since the lotus pods did glow, as promised,” he went on, his voice soothing. Deceptively so. “Someone paid even more money to see if other talismans would work, too.

“And they did. Every last one of them.”

The words resounded in the ensuing silence, a background noise of the busy cafe universes away.

Heavens, Wei Wuxian thought weakly to the complex whirlwind of contradicting emotions. What had he even uploaded to that website?! Talisman for lotuses, sure, but what else? Half-arsed scribbles of the spirit lure? Experimental array to counter the Hundred Hole Curse?!

Nie Huaisang was clearly enjoying the devastation he had wrought, the terrible, terrible man.

“But anyway!” He leaned back in his seat, the intimidating spell broken. “How do you feel about holidays in Qinghe? After your graduation ceremony, of course. We could go over my

art collection, and sample local delicacies.” He took a sip of his tea. “Talk about what the Nie can offer a cultivator of your calibre.”

“Nie Huaisang!” Wei Wuxian hissed once his friend’s meaning sunk in, wrapping his jacket tightly around himself with the energy of a scandalised maiden hiding her bosom from a lecherous gaze. “Are you trying to *poach me*?!”

“Mn. Is it working?”

(It was to an extent. Wei Wuxian agreed to affiliate himself as a scholar without joining the Nie. Then, worn down by his friend's nagging, updated his account name to “Yiling Patriarch / Wei Wuxian”, status to “affiliated, not a disciple” and put “five years as Yunmeng Jiang head disciple before defecting” into the “accomplishments” field. Mean-faced Nie disciples worked wonders keeping insistent clan recruiters out of Qinghe, although none of them proved as mean-faced or effective as one Lan Wangji. He appeared at Wei Wuxian's side the moment his foot touched the ground on the Gusu Academy campus, appointing himself Wei Wuxian's bodyguard, then Wei Wuxian's fake boyfriend, and then he was hand-feeding Wei Wuxian tangerines across the table from Lan Qiren on the eve of Spring Festival. The rest was history.)

BUT ACTUALLY, IT HAPPENED LIKE THIS:

“Contemporary Talismanic and Array Science is a new course the Gusu Academy is offering for the first time this semester. There has been a pressing need for a curriculum that addresses the epoch-making advancements in both the cultivation theory and applied cultivation.” Professor Lan (*Grandmaster Lan* , once outside the campus) allowed the barest hint of emotion to mellow his stern countenance. “Truly, it is an exciting time to be alive.”

From his seat in the back row, Wei Wuxian listened to the little welcoming speech with growing incredulity. Sure, after parting ways with the Jiangs he had been beyond busy, working to keep his STEM scholarship and his head above water, so an occasional night hunt aside, he wasn’t exactly up to date with the cultivation world anymore. But things had been rather...stale in the academically inclined side of Jianghu, with the last major breakthrough happening about four hundred years ago and even that was about rehashing the same old, recovering an ancient technique, not someone actually inventing stuff. Lofty name or not, he had expected to breeze through this class, getting back into the thick of things, now that his engineering degree was well on its way to completion.

How was it possible such a drastic change occurred in the five minutes when Wei Wuxian wasn’t paying attention?

Having said that, if this was the first university-level attempt to summarise supposed epoch-making advancements, it explained why the halls were suddenly crawling with a frankly astounding number of clan cultivators in their early twenties, most of them on a semester

exchange programme. Wei Wuxian had already spotted Nie Huaisang across the auditorium and Lan Wangji was looking pretty in the front row.

He propped his chin on his hand. In some ways it was like summer camp at Cloud Recesses all over again, he supposed.

“The most astounding is the fact this long-awaited renaissance has been ushered in by a single, anonymous genius,” Professor Lan went on with his lecture, and Wei Wuxian had to say, watching him do his damndest yet still fail to contain his inner fanboy was an unexpected boon to signing up for the class. Whomever it was that shook the old man’s world so thoroughly, they had to be *good*.

Despite the threat of many incoming all-nighters, he couldn’t wait to get his hands on some revolutionary arrays.

“A single scholar who only goes by the alias,” Professor Lan made an honest-to-heaven dramatic pause, before reverently name-dropping, “Yiling Patriarch.”

Wei Wuxian’s hand slid from under his chin and he fell forward onto his desk with a resounding *thud*.

“Wei Ying!” Professor Lan snapped, onto the source of disturbance like a bloodhound.

“Sorry, professor!” He called sheepishly, sore chin cradled in his palm. Ignoring disapproving stares, he sought with his eyes Nie Huaisang, who was looking back at him, as flabbergasted as Wei Wuxian himself was. It didn’t matter that they hadn’t seen each other since Wei Wuxian’s defection; falling right back into familiar patterns, they shared a full-blown conversation with just head tilts and eyebrow movements. *Did I just hear that right? No, come on, it can’t be. What are the odds, right? There has to be someone else calling himself that*.

Except that projector whirled to life at that moment and Wei Wuxian was going to die of cringe should the sheer bafflement not get him first, because right there, displayed on a huge screen, in front of a packed auditorium, Professor Lan and *Lan Wangji*, was his terrible life choice in form of a joke profile on Cultivation Researcher Independent when bored at Cloud Recesses. Any attempts at denial were brutally squashed by his old doodle of a black lop rabbit with a red ribbon set as an avatar. This was his doing, alright. Down to the *I might upload more later, lol* in the description box.

How in the fuck did glowing lotuses escalate to epoch-making?

What renaissance?!

“Some believe Yiling Patriarch is content to live off the wealth his designs brought him and that is why he has been refusing any contact. But cultivators everywhere are hoping that one day, he shall share his wisdom again.”

Lan Qiren sounded wistful. Wei Wuxian had no idea how to deal with it, other than perhaps laughing his head off, more bubbling hysteria than genuine amusement – which on second

thought was pretty terrible, highly likely to have him booted out of the class in a twisted callback to the summer camp at Cloud Recesses, where he had made the very talismans the old man was now lecturing about.

On that cheery note, Wei Wuxian surreptitiously fished out his phone from his pocket. It wasn't only misery that loved company, he decided. A good, old-fashioned freakout craved it, too.

Nie Huaisang was of the same mind, as evident by the slew of incoming messages.

Nie Huaisang

Wei Wuxian!!!

What the FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF

WHAT, HOW

Why didn't you tell me those talismans sold?!

Wei Wuxian

I didn't know!

Nie Huaisang

What do you mean you didn't know, didn't you check your bank balance? DIDN'T YOU CHECK YOUR EMAIL?! How did it go again, all-hail-yilinglaozu@...

Wei Wuxian

asdfghjkl, I forgot I had it, okay?! I don't even remember the password anymore!

Nie Huaisang

Wei Wuxian, YOU'RE KILLING ME, gkjhfaskdf, check that bank balance ASAP, going off just these you're a FREAKING MILLIONAIRE !!!!!1one

Following that message was an avalanche of article thumbnails, one click-batey title more embarrassing than the other. Wei Wuxian stared at *Miraculously Cured! Jin Zixun Vows To Name His Firstborn After Yiling Patriarch* for so long his eyes began to water, wondering if this wasn't just a giant prank played on his unsuspecting self – except that Jianghu sorely lacked the level of cooperation, not to mention the sense of humour, needed to pull off anything of the sort, which meant the *epoch-making* status of his teenaged tomfoolery was somehow, *terrifyingly*, the more plausible explanation.

An outbreak of pinpricks on his neck prompted him to glance up.

Lan Wangji was frowning at him over his shoulder as if he could freaking smell Wei Wuxian's unauthorised use of electronic devices during lectures (forbidden in Gusu Academy) all the way from the front row. Maybe the bloodhound sensibilities ran in the main Lan line, passed from uncles to nephews, Wei Wuxian thought, giving him his best disarming grin.

Given his ongoing existential crisis, it might have ended up more *emotional instability* than *pure sunshine*.

Lan Wangji held his gaze for a long moment, before turning around with a swish of his forehead ribbon, present even when out of hanfu.

As much as Wei Wuxian would have loved to stare at it some more, and at the elegant fall of Lan Wangji's hair, and at the strong set of his shoulders, there was a long queue of problems demanding his immediate attention, starting with:

Wei Wuxian

What should I do about this class, though?!

I can't stay, can I???

Nie Huaisang

What do you mean, of course, you can!

Wei Wuxian

But isn't this technically cheating?

Nie Huaisang

What cheating?!

Think of it as an ultimate blowoff class! And with you at my side, I might even scrape a passing grade! With old man Lan teaching, it would be a first lol

Focused on typing his reply, Wei Wuxian noticed the looming presence a smidge too late.

“Unauthorised use of electronic devices during lectures is forbidden,” hissed the embodiment of contemptuous disapproval that was Lan Qiren, towering over his desk and poised to snatch the offending phone.

Startled, Wei Wuxian made to lean back in his seat, then maybe make a break for it and hole himself somewhere until some resemblance of sense returned to the world, but somehow this sentiment translated to his fingers slacking their grip on the phone. The pit of Wei Wuxian’s stomach dropped alongside the blasted device, now laying on the desk, the screen with an incriminating message threat bared to Lan Qiren’s judgemental gaze and selective abidance to the Lan rule on the secrecy of correspondence.

“Blowoff class?”

A hush fell upon the auditorium, the silence deader than dead. Level of noise reaching negative values. Heads were turning if they hadn’t already, the scrutiny from his peers a heady mix of curiosity, annoyance and a pinch of pity, because yay him, it appeared Wei Wuxian had gone and found the one button of Lan Qiren’s that absolutely, under no circumstances should ever be pushed.

Nevermind the fist closed around a piece of chalk, even the old man’s beard was shaking with barely suppressed rage.

“Is this class boring to you?” Lan Qiren bristled, each word louder than the one before. “The great revolution, unlike anything the cultivation world has seen in millennia, is not challenging enough?!”

A choir of teacher’s pet wannabes obediently snorted.

“Um.” There was no short answer to that question, was there?

Lan Qiren’s glare transcended to a whole new level of disdain. “Are you familiar with Lan Yao’s array for sealing cursed artefacts?”

Wei Wuxian wasn’t sure what that had to do with anything, but he might have spent one afternoon back in Cloud Recesses pretending to copy the rules while reading Lan Yao’s treatise. “Yes.”

Lan Qiren snorted. “Don’t kid yourself.”

That was how in a nutshell Wei Wuxian found himself half an hour later, standing in front of the blackboards, fingers dry with chalk dust and temper spiking. Lan Yao’s array has long

since been abandoned, wiped away to make space for other designs, as Lan Qiren kept quizzing him on theory far exceeding both the enrollment requirements and the curriculum of this class. About three arrays ago they lost even Lan Wangji.

“If I reverse the order of the strokes, like so – ”

“The character for fire will throw it out of balance,” Lan Qiren interjected, stroking his beard with an air of vicious satisfaction in Wei Wuxian’s seat.

Wei Wuxian took a long, calming breath. This was ridiculous and not in the way Lan Wangji always accused him to be. Lan Qiren obviously wanted to prove him stupid, and since Wei Wuxian would not do him the courtesy of being an incompetent moron, he dragged this thing on, barely letting him get two words out at the time. At least his peers seemed to be getting some entertainment out of this, watching their back and forth like an emotionally-invested audience at a tennis match.

And Nie Huaisang wasn’t as discreet as he thought he was, filming this fiasco with his iPhone from behind a tower of textbooks.

“It will not, because redirected energy flow – ”

“No, you are *mistaken* !”

Oh, for heaven’s sake! It took a lot to piss Wei Wuxian off, but Lan Qiren had him near the breaking point.

“If professor Lan would so kindly let me finish – ”

“Before making such outrageous claims, *boy* ,” Lan Qiren spat out the word and there it was – the same condescension Wei Wuxian had been force-fed his whole life. No matter what he ever said or did, in the great scheme of things it meant nothing. To Lan Qiren – to all Jianghu – mattered only that he was an orphaned son to rogue cultivators, who had fallen out of favour with Yunmeng Jiang.

Perhaps washing his hands off the cultivation world to live off his supposed wealth, like “some” already believed him to do, was worth looking into.

“ – You should at least do your research, first.”

Teacher’s pet wannabes, all heirs to minor cultivation clans, rushed to snicker although their eyes were glazed over, washed off any understanding.

Wei Wuxian tightened his grip on the chalk.

“Starting with He Zhao’s analysis published last year in the *Journal of Contemporary Talismanic and Array Science* on Yiling Patriarch’s – !”

Yeah, okay. No. Wei Wuxian didn’t start this pissing contest, but he would end it. He put the chalk down with more force than strictly necessary, then straightened up to his full height.

Any trace of polite deference wiped clean, he fixed Lan Qiren with a hard look.

A hush fell over the auditorium once more.

“I am the Yiling Patriarch.”

(The auditorium descended into pandemonium. Shocking Reveal! Yiling Patriarch Slays The Academia!! was uploaded and at once went viral, with #iamtheyilingpatriarch soon trending on social media. Once Lan Qiren got a grip on himself, he made Wei Wuxian recover all his passwords and breathed down his neck as he logged in to his account on Cultivation Researcher Independent. Then, he dragged him by the ear to a hastily called meeting of the whole Cultivation Studies Department of Gusu Academy, which in a couple of hours turned into an impromptu Discussion Conference, since esteemed clan researchers were soon banging at the door, having flown at neck-breaking speed the second Lan Qiren confirmed the Yiling Patriarch's identity. Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian's one attempt to escape the chaos via the washroom window was thwarted by Lan Wangji, who then attached himself to his side with Lan Qiren's silent blessing and refused to leave it ever again.)

End Notes

Dear Recipient Of This Gift,
I hope this story made you smile. Happy New Year!

You can find me [here](#).
Not much in there, but feel free to say hi :D.

Works inspired by this one

[One Can Keep A Secret \(If He Does Not Know It's There\)_\[Podfic\]](#) by [Greywake](#)

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